

from being abused or harmed by those to whom we have entrusted them.

Not unlike the Brady bill, this law creates a national data base network. This one can be used by any child care provider in America to conduct a background check to determine if a job applicant can be trusted with our children, and if not, to prevent that person from ever working with children.

For the first time, we'll have a system in place to protect the many millions of American children who receive care and supervision in formal day care and in other settings from other organizations. This law will give us the tools we need to safeguard children from those who have perpetrated crimes of child abuse or sex abuse or drug use or those who have been convicted of felonies. It's very important that we give working parents peace of mind about child care.

A majority of mothers with young children now work outside the home. Six million children are placed in formal day care settings every day. Balancing work and family is hard, and parents are worried about their personal security and the security of their children in an increasingly violent world.

Like the Brady bill and the crime bill, which I hope and believe will pass soon, this act will help us to take our streets, our neighborhoods, the institutions we rely on, back for American values and American children. There is nothing more important that our Government could be doing now.

Like all change, passing this important law has not been easy. And there are many to thank. First of all, I thank you, Oprah, for a lifetime of being committed to the well-being of our children and for giving child abuse issues such wonderful coverage on your show. You wrote the original blueprint for this law, and we're grateful, becoming a tireless advocate for its passage, lobbying Members of Congress of both parties for more than 2 years, and lobbying the President—people occasionally do that, too. All of us, but especially our children, owe you their gratitude.

Now we can help to prevent child abuse with this measure, not just to catch people who do it. It's a great cause and a remarkable achievement, and I want to thank all the rest of you who were involved in it.

Finally, let me say, especially for the benefit of the Members of Congress here, this is the last piece of legislation I will sign from this session of Congress. It wraps up a very productive session, a session that dealt with family leave and motor voter and a new economic plan that brought low interest rates and recovery, with the national service bill that I think will galvanize the imagination of a whole generation of young people, with new trade legislation, and with the Brady bill. But this is a good bill to end on, a bill that ends where all of us should begin, by putting our children first.

Thank you very much. I'd like to invite you all to come up here for the signing.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:54 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Marian Wright Edelman, president and executive director, Children's Defense Fund; Oprah Winfrey and Lynn Swann, television hosts; and Andrew Vachss, originator of the concept of the legislation. H.R. 1237, approved December 20, was assigned Public Law No. 103-209.

Statement on Signing Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Care Legislation

December 20, 1993

I am deeply concerned about the reports of health problems afflicting a number of our Persian Gulf veterans. The legislation I am signing today, H.R. 2535, addresses those problems by authorizing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to treat them for any disease that may have resulted from their exposure to toxic substances or environmental hazards in the Gulf.

Since our troops returned home over 2 years ago, we have heard from many who are experiencing serious health problems for which modern medicine is having difficulty establishing a cause or a diagnosis.

With parades and a national outpouring of gratitude, we showed those brave men and women our appreciation for the sacrifices they made for all of us. Now we must stand by those who are suffering.

The symptoms these veterans experience have included, among other things, fatigue, painful muscles and joints, bleeding gums, skin rashes, short-term memory loss, and hair loss. With this legislation, the VA will have the authority to provide to these veterans both inpatient and outpatient care on a priority basis. Thus, we can help make certain that these veterans' health care needs are met as fully as possible while important research into their problems goes forward.

This legislation also provides for reimbursement to these veterans for any copayments they may have made to the VA for care that might have been necessary because of their exposures in the Persian Gulf.

In addition, this legislation extends the VAs authority to:

- furnish Vietnam veterans with care that may be related to their exposure to agent orange;
- furnish veterans who participated in nuclear weapons tests or in the occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki with care that may be related to their exposure to ionizing radiation;
- provide women veterans with sexual trauma counseling; and,
- maintain its regional office in the Philippines.

Over 650,000 service men and women from United States forces valiantly forced Saddam Hussein's armies from Kuwait, and earned the respect and admiration of people around the globe. They also earned our Nation's undying gratitude and support.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
December 20, 1993.

NOTE: H.R. 2535, approved December 20, was assigned Public Law No. 103-210.

Statement on Establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

December 20, 1993

I welcome the decision today by the United Nations General Assembly to establish a High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Since Eleanor Roosevelt first fought for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the United States has led the way to ensure that the United Nations is a strong force for human dignity and respect for basic civil and political rights. The High Commissioner will be an influential and persuasive advocate for human rights around the world.

The High Commissioner's mandate to promote human rights worldwide will include coordinating human rights activities within the United Nations system, providing advisory services and technical assistance to governments and regional human rights organizations, and engaging in dialog with governments on promotion of human rights.

Today's action achieves one of my key goals for this year's U.N. General Assembly and advances an enduring goal of American foreign policy. The United States will lend its full support to the High Commissioner's efforts to ensure that the citizens of the world are able to live free from repression and fear.

Appointment of Assistant to the President for Congressional Affairs

December 20, 1993

The President announced today that he has appointed Pat Griffin to be the Assistant to the President for Congressional Affairs. Mr. Griffin, an experienced professional with experience in academia, government, and the private sector, will begin work at the White House in mid-January.

"I am very glad to have someone of Pat Griffin's skill and experience leading my legislative team here at the White House," said the President. "We have an ambitious agenda on the Hill for the next year, with difficult challenges like health care, crime, and welfare reform to be addressed. I am counting on Pat to work closely with Members on both sides of the aisle to move those issues forward."

NOTE: A biography of the appointee was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.